



Adoption is Key for Minority Groups Focusing on Broadband Expansion

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WASHINGTON, July 21, 2009 – The coordinator of the national broadband plan at the Federal Communications Commission, Blair Levin said Monday he is less optimistic about the broadband efforts than he was when he accepted the job.

The Minority Media and Telecom Council today brought together both public and private broadband representatives, where Levin stated that after reading more than 8,000 pages of comments in the FCC's broadband proceeding that the agency received from the public, he is "much less optimistic as when Chairman Copps asked me to come in."

Levin wasn't quite jovial in his statements, either. He said that the comments – bar a few – have primarily criticized FCC policy and history, or asked for money. But few have offered a real plan to achieve ubiquitous broadband coverage.

There is "very little in the 8,000-something pages that moves the ball forward.... The insight has to be tied to an exact government action," he said.

Levin himself said, "I don't really know anything" when it comes to the current state of broadband in the United States, or what it may look like in the future.

Levin pointed out the need for granular, sophisticated data in order to make educated decisions, something the FCC hopes to possess within the next year – long before the fruition of the Broadband Data Improvement Act, as implemented by the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Special Assistant to the President for Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy Susan Crawford agreed that the government needs data- and demand-side information in order to create data-driven policy.

Such knowledge can develop "comprehensive approach to broadband adoption," said Crawford.

Individuals at the conference citing statistics for the percentage of minorities not adopting broadband varied from 20 percent to 37 percent. Reasons cited ranged from fear of internet safety, incomplete knowledge of the tools, to computers being unaffordable. The MMTC hopes to held address these problems.

Crawford spoke of “increasing the pool of investment” in order for small business to get in on the money while the time is opportune.

“We can’t guarantee the result, but we can guarantee the result,” said Crawford.

Chairman and CEO of One Economy Foundation Rey Ramsey said that his organization was focused on bringing broadband knowledge to those who need it most.

“A baby was born” at the conference today, with the announcement of the Broadband Opportunity Coalition, newly formed coalition of civil rights and minority groups.

The coalition was formed “to ensure not only for this round of stimulus dollars but for as long as it takes[for broadband to be] adopted by people of color in every corner of the country,” said Ramsey.

Ramsey said that the industry needed not “build a bridge to nowhere,” or a bridge without people on it. Joining Levin and Crawford’s statements on the need for data, Ramsey highlighted both mediocre demand, and real uncertainty about what incentive there is to develop high-cost infrastructure in unserved or underserved areas.

“Relevant content is one of the most important elements of demand,” said Ramsey.

However, that discussion took place earlier in the day, Google Policy Counsel Harry Wingo said that Google has been providing pertinent content through services such as Gmail, Google Earth, and – on Monday – Google Moon.

Wingo said the current administration has taken a strong lead to encourage broadband adoption. “Absolutely on Government 2.0.... It saves costs and show leadership,” he said.

Joseph Waz, senior vice president at Comcast, said, “I would hope that the One Economy program will be the breeding ground for the next generation of entrepreneurs.”

Many at the conference voiced concerns over funding and gaining capital for investment. Blair Levin said that the FCC “is no Santa Clause.”

He said that applicants in all groups need to show a real plan for broadband development.

Levin said that the FCC has developed a unique process for issuing these grants, being innovative in receiving and publicizing comments and tools for reviewing applications. But “if all we have is a great process, in the end we will fail. We need good ideas.”